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SUBJECT: UNESCO - DECENTRALIZATION AND THE ONE UN

¶1. Summary: Briefing Member States on UNESCO's progress regarding decentralization and the "One UN", D-G Matsuura indicated he is pleased with the efforts made to date to integrate UNESCO into the concept, and that he will work to improve issues of concern like staff rotation and program coordination in order to ensure UNESCO's "place at the UN table" in country. End summary.

¶2. Director General Matsuura held an information meeting on 19 March 2008 to bring Member States up to date on UNESCO's work regarding the "One UN" reforms and UNESCO's decentralization efforts. The meeting was well attended with many ambassadors and the D-G's top level staff present.

¶3. Matsuura said that he was very pleased with the evolution of UNESCO's role in connection with the "One UN" reforms, noting that UNESCO has had a "positive influence" on UN reform in the "delivering as one" process. He mentioned that the next high-level meeting on the subject would be held in Bern at the end of April.

¶4. He noted that the eight pilot programs being carried out have been very successful, though there has been some frustration, as some believe the pilots take too long to reach conclusions, and that informal stock taking permits all concerned to make early identification of key issues, and draw some lessons for future use.

¶5. The main objective, according to Matsuura is finding best ways for UN agencies to work together to design joint programming based on joint reflection and joint prioritization. He added that it is already clear from the pilot projects that "one size does not fit all", though lessons learned from the initial projects will help guide future rollout of new pilots.

¶6. Matsuura said that there are many issues that have yet to be resolved, including how to best integrate civil society and NGO's, Bretton-Woods institutions like the World Bank, and humanitarian agencies into the program. Matsuura said that he has earmarked two percent of regular program resources for country level programming exercises.

¶7. The Director-General said that while UNESCO has a physical presence in 51 Member States and two liaison offices (New York and Geneva), it is impossible to be present in all countries. He also said that UNESCO is stretched thin as our mandate in five major fields makes it difficult to cover everything, as we would like to. He then mentioned that UNESCO's One UN task force had suggested the use of "mobile teams" that would potentially intervene for a limited time in a country.

¶8. Matsuura also spoke at length about the need for UNESCO to maximize our use of "UNESCO's larger family", noting that Category II centers, university chairs, National Commissions, Associated schools, goodwill ambassadors, NGO's, etc. must be better used as advocates for UNESCO's work overseas.

¶9. Matsuura raised concerns about increased costs associated with UNESCO's new role in "One UN", noting that where in many cases we had previously been housed free of charge by the member states, we

would now be obliged to share common costs in the UN country headquarters. He said that security concerns would also raise costs, as some UN sites have recently been the target of violent attacks.

¶10. During the question and answer session that followed, the Tanzanian ambassador said that the development of civil society is not level in all countries, and noted that in Tanzania, foreign-based NGO's are a particular presence that must be considered. He then asked whether the UN should participate in capacity building for civil society, adding a second question as to whether involving civil society will slow down "One UN" decision making. The D-G responded by saying that international civil society representatives have been actively participating in all of the high-level meetings.

¶11. Several comments on UNESCO staff rotation came up, with particular focus on the perception among Paris-based staff that working in the field offices is still considered punishment. The D-G replied that while there has been some progress made on rotation, and that all new employees are obliged to sign contracts indicating their worldwide availability, there is still a lot of work to be done on the question of staff mobility.

¶12. Another question came up on the possibility of cost savings by "outsourcing" back-office services to countries where costs are cheaper. The D-G replied that he had not yet looked carefully at the question, but said that it should be examined more closely, noting that the Secretariat had been concentrating more on developing and introducing new technologies like the SISTER database to improve efficiency.

¶13. The Senegalese ambassador then spoke, saying that it is often difficult to coordinate field office activities with the government "line ministers" in country, leading to weaknesses in implementation of programs. The D-G acknowledged that this is an area that will require greater coordination.

¶14. In response to a question by the Czech ambassador, the D-G noted that there are 30 UN specialized agencies, and that it is not acceptable that they can act as "free radicals" in country. He stressed that there must be coordination of the UN activities in country.

¶15. When asked about the chances of UNESCO staffers being named as resident country coordinators, the D-G agreed that UNDP seemed to be favored, but seemed hopeful that in the future, UNESCO staff could lead the UN offices in country.

¶16. Overall, the D-G stressed that UNESCO must remain flexible as the "One UN" program develops, and to see how UNESCO can best take part, in order to raise its visibility, improve its effectiveness, and make its place as a player seated at the UN table. OLIVER